



TRADITIONAL VILLAGE COUNCILS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH-A STUDY OF ITS TYPES AND NATURE OF ADJUDICATION

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Abstract

The study of the traditional village councils of Arunachal Pradesh is an attempt to expose the hidden legal treasure of the different tribes of this state and to discover how the different type of village council exists in the tribes of same culture., In spite of varying and vicissitudes developments, the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have common features in them which justify their corporate life as a member of common civilization whose primary characteristics are faith in harmonious and cohesive social life. When the natural life of the tribesman comes to itself in the caressing lap of nature, their spiritual being becomes manifest and thus, all of their behaviours and actions become controlled and regulated by righteousness and spiritual acquisition which can very well be illuminated and exemplified by the system of the uninterrupted functioning of the age- old traditional village Councils of this state.

Keywords: Village, Arunachal Pradesh, Nature

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1. Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh is predominantly a heterogeneous tribal state with 26 major tribes who constitute 64.22 percent of total population (Census 2001). The socio-Cultural matrixes of these heterogeneous groups are areas of research interests for their uniqueness. The uniqueness lies not in the diversity of the socio-cultural life, but the scope they provide for theoretical understanding of social phenomena. It is in this context that a study of political systems of tribal communities assumes significance. A cursory look at the political systems presents a picture of a complex reality in similar religious groups, as they do not have similar types of political system. For example, Buddhist Monpas and

Khamptis do not have similar types of political systems; while the Khamptis have chieftaincy, the Monpas have an acephalous society. The *Tani* groups of tribes who

considered *Tani* as their common ancestor do not have similar systems; the Adis have a three tier system at territorial and tribe levels while the Nyishis have an arbiter type of political system at village level. Even within the Nyishi community, the political system varies from *Dupam* in Koloriang area (Soring, 2004) to *Nyele* in Seppa and adjacent areas. However, different tribal groups like the Mishmis and the Tagin have similar arbiter systems. Similarly, Khamptis and Noctes have more or less same political system in spite of their difference not only in their faiths and beliefs but also in their racial identity. Besides, the Akas in spite of being a single tribe have two different political systems namely *Nyele* of the Khoro group and *Mele* of the Hrusso group (Hissang, 2005). Thus, the existence of similarly political systems under some heterogeneous conditions and different systems under similar conditions trigger of the research interests of social scientist for an understanding of the phenomenon.

In this context, the present study is a preliminary enquiry into the causes of the emergences of different types of village councils and its nature. The analysis of this paper is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data is based on observation and interview while the secondary data has been collected from the literature related on the topics and other officials' records.

Political System - Conceptual Comprehension

To put the political life of the people in a tribal community into category is difficult. This is because of our efforts to study the traditional system by applying the modern concepts of political system, which give us, either too narrow or too general of an understanding. For example, democracy is contested when women are not allowed or are not facilitated to participate (Elwin, 1957/1988:157) in the village council like *Keba/Kebang*. The use of the term democracy (Elwin, 1965; Thungon, 1997) restricts its meaning to include male population only contradicts the rhetoric (Dubey, 1998:2:22; Roy, 1966/1997:218). Similarly, that *Keba/Kebang* is a government by the people and for the people (Dubey and Roy, *ibid.*) the term 'council' normally carries the connotation of something formal. Whether from this point of view the village political life can be understood within the conceptual frame of the council (cf. Thungon, 1997) needs to be addressed with more theoretical rigour, for the system is very much informal (Dubey. *Ibid.*2:3). Moreover, the institutional arrangement of political life is not restricted to village level as can be seen from the discussion. It needs to be debated whether the institutional arrangement of political life of tribal community can be understood under the blanket term, 'village council'. Similarly a conceptual problem arises to understand the traditional political arrangement of the tribe as 'self-governing institutions' (cf. Goswami, 2002, Roy Burrman 2002:24-27; Father Krick, quoted

in Elwin, 1957/1988; Dubey, *ibid.* 2:1 and Talukdar, 1987:36-37). Because the conceptual connotation of the term 'self' is intriguing in many cases. Hence, before put the traditional village council into different category in our modern political system it is necessary to have an in-depth research on the subject. Because, many of the earlier writing the traditional village council of different tribes has been mistakenly put into different category in the modern political system.

Nature of political system

An obvious line of reasoning, with reference to the above discussion, shows that religion cannot be a factor to explain similarities or differences of the political systems in this tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, ancestry also cannot help in explaining the differences. Even culture as a factor cannot throw much light in understanding such differences, as we have seen that cultural differences among Khamptis and Noctes have not given the two communities different political systems. On the other hand, to some extent, the differences in political system have attributed different cultural identities to different communities. For example, the political system i.e. *Buliang* of the Apatanis is different from that of arbiter system of the Nyishis. This difference is markedly evident in their cultures because a political system in itself is a component of culture. It can be further reasoned that the cultural similarities between any two tribes have not been powerful enough to affect the political system in a similar line. In other words, similar material cultures or similar faiths in supernatural cannot contribute for the emergences of similar political systems say for example, in Galo and Mishmis communities. However, the above discussion does not suggest that the differences in political systems can be studied outside their present cultural boundaries. It is not to interconnectedness of cultural factors, which can be used for the analysis purpose; rather the answer is to be sought among the interacted factors, which built up the cultural identity. Obviously, the focus is not on the interconnectedness of various components of the culture, but on the events and situations that interacted in the past to shape the present cultural identity. No doubt, the analysis refers to a diachronic understanding of the phenomenon that is the political system, is attempted at an explanation with reference to a social process, which in our study is assumed migration and interaction with the environment.

Notwithstanding, the most important one which shapes the cultural identity of the community is human interaction with the surroundings. The dynamics of interaction between human and its nature resulted from human migration. It can be argued with some degree of certainty that migration happens to a major factor that defines the nature of human interaction especially when tribal communities were nomadic or semi-nomadic. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have the treasure of their migration stories. Hence, the hypothesis on the emergences of different types of traditional village councils in Arunachal

Pradesh is that migration and resultant interaction with environment resulted in the origin of specific types of political system in the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh.

Types of Political System

The present study on the types of traditional village councils is based on the nature of the society and the existence of central authority (cf, Sinha, 1962:100). The societies with some sorts of central authority have chieftaincy, while those without any central authority are acephalous types of society. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Noctes, the Tangsas, the Wangchos, the Khamptis and the Singphos have chieftainship type of societies. The chieftainship is hereditary in the family among the Noctes, Tangsas and Wangchos while it is the clan among the Khamptis. The *Chautang*, *Lungking* and *Namchum* are the royal clans among the Khamptis in India. The chieftainship has two aspects; territorial and communal. Unlike Noctes and Singphos the Tangsas doesn't have territorial or clan chief. They have a chief for each village (Taisam, 2004:35). Likewise, the Khamptis have a chief at the tribal level known as *Chaukha-Kongmong*. In addition to the tribal chief, each Khampti village has a chief known as *Chauman*. However, in case of Noctes there are two paramount chief namely the chief of Borduria and Namsang. Similarly the Singphos have also territorial chiefs. The Singpho chief who is called *Agi* or *Mirem* is both a clan chief and territorial chief. For example, the *Ningroo* chief and *Bisa Gam* are territorial chiefs in the Singpho community. The chief of each tribes discharge their various duties in the matter of settling dispute, organising wars and economic pursuits. The councils of the Khamptis is known as *Mukchup*, *Ruung*, *Rangtun* and *Rungkathin* among the Tangsas, *Ngongwang* among the Noctes and *Tra-Tungdai* among the Singphos (Dutta, 111).

The acephalous communities have body politics of varied nature. No conceptual frame can be applicable to explain the body politics in these communities. There are element of democracy, gerontocracy and oligarchy, combined in different degrees. Even the oligarchies too have some element of democracy in them while all the systems have a gerontocratic tendency in their constitution (Talukdar, 2002:164). There is also the practice of intermediating between conflicting groups. In Adi and Galo communities, the body politics is known as *Kebang* (*Keba* among the Galos) at three territorial levels. At village level there is *Dolung/Dolu Keba*, at the level of group of village there is *Bango Keba* and at the tribe level there is *Bogum-Boka Keba*. *Keba* is referred as village council in many earlier writings. However, based on the modern concept it is difficult to explain the *Keba* as a council as it is not a formal institution. Whenever there is a dispute, on the report of a plaintiff; village elders conduct a meeting which is called *Keba*. The literally meaning of *Keba* is 'a gathering'. *Keba* are also known as oratory. The members are neither elected nor are hereditary. They are the clan elders who assembled together and deliberate upon the issue of a dispute on the basis of evidence and with reference to convention and

customary practices. Usually, the clan elders with oratory or Knowledge in traditional lore are practically the Keba members. In spite of all these qualifications, *Keba* displays the characteristics of a limited democracy.

The political system of Apatanis has a different reality. There is *Buliang* at village level whose members are more or less hereditary. The *Buliang* also exist at inter village level and at tribe level. Besides, there is also *Gondu* who is an intermediary between the conflicting parties. He can settle the dispute without calling the *Buliang*. In the case of Sherdukpen community there are two social divisions namely, *Thong* and *Chao*. The clans in the Thong group of clans as the chief. The chief is not hereditary in the family or in a particular clan but is hereditary in the upper division of the community, i.e. *Thong*. There are also members with specific assignments. The village body politics of the Sherdukpen contains some elements of oligarchy and gerontocracy like that of Apatanis (Talukdar, *ibid.* 170). The Monpa body politics can be viewed as a council as the *Tsorgen* is elected for a period of three years. The other members are also either elected or appointed. In the Monpa village council a Lama or a commoner can be the *Tsorgen*. Moreover, the village council does not function according to Buddhist tenets and hence is not a theocratic as mentioned in some earlier writings (Talukdar, *ibid.* Dubey, *op.cit.* 2:19). The Mishmis and Nyishis have an arbiter system. The *Gingdung* i.e. the mediator settles the disputes by himself or by calling a meeting of the elders known as *Nyele*. The *Gingdungs* are professional intermediaries; they negotiate the issue between the parties and try to find out a solution as compromise, which is bilaterally acceptable.

Conclusion

To conclude, though migration has a major influence on the pattern of political system yet it is not the only factor. There are other factors like size of the population and frequency of migration, which contribute to evolution of different types of political system in Arunachal Pradesh. However, more research in the above line of reasoning are necessary for a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the pattern of migration and evolution of political system. What seems more logical is the functional necessity, which cropped up consequent upon the pattern of migration, affected the emergence of diverse political systems in the State and thus justifies different institutions in similar cultures and similar institutions in different cultures.

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